**In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, magi from the East came to Jerusalem, 2asking, “Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.” 3When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. 5They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: *6‘And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.’” – Matthew 2. 1 – 6***

A black and white photo of an old building

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**Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” *– Matthew 22. 21***

Dear Church,

Our holy days of Christmas have been for most of us a time of family, feasting, gift-giving, and inspirational worship. Enclosed with this letter, you will find a calendar listing the dates and times set as we continue to enjoy those traditions of our faith community. Beyond your own plans to participate in them, please invite your friends and holiday guests to experience for themselves something of these occasions that have been meaningful for your faith journey.

In the background of all the activity of our sacred season of Advent/Christmas, the story of the cosmos continues to unfold. That story on the stage of the northern hemisphere has cast “light” and “darkness” as major characters. Currently, the earth tilts the northern hemisphere away from the sun and darkness dominates as we approach Christmas Day, until when on December 21st the tilt reverses so that the light returns to dominate our hemisphere in the days following. Our forebears of the church placed Christmas on Dec. 25th to pair the birth of Jesus with the returning of the sunlight. So that, just as the sunlight makes the growth of plant and animal life possible, we remember the nativity of Jesus, who brings hope, peace, joy, love, and the presence of God’s life with us. It is a story event of cosmic proportion.

Periodically, the hemispheric rhythms of light are eclipsed as when a nearby planet or earth’s moon interposes itself between earth and the sun. I well remember the eclipse of August 21, 2017, the day I moved into my new residence. So complete was the eclipsing of the light some swaths of the U.S. were “blacked out”. Astronomers understand eclipses to be normal celestial accidents, and yet, differently “enlightened” cultures see in an eclipse ominous signs portending plague, famine, invasion, or some other major life-threatening series of events. Celestials signs with earthly import.

The Magi mentioned in the scripture above paid attention to these astronomical events and interpreted their earthly significance - a bright star signaling the birth of a king of the Jews. In any era, the birth of a rival raises the specter for conflict when a challenge threatens to eclipse current political arrangements. All institutions are political and organized for good or evil with gradations of each on a spectrum of power. The birth of Jesus was clearly an event with political portent – all births are, of course! And in the life of Jesus, we learn how God’s power arrangements are aligned by love in service to rival and transform our easily entrenched, fear-based, “might makes right” mindset. Until we welcome the lessons of love’s alignment, we all trend in the direction of being cast as a King Herod, an Imperial Caesar, or a High Priest Caiaphas in our context.

We do well to be reminded of the story of God’s work and to consider our part in it for this next year that includes another U.S. presidential election, where rivals will challenge power arrangements, where fear will threaten to eclipse love. As you read the calendar, you will note how the titles for each Sunday sermon in the liturgical season of Advent/Christmas incline us to hear the stories of the gospel prophets who address “eclipsing empire” with hope, peace, joy, love, attentiveness, and presence. Our faith tradition understands Jesus as the one born to be the “light of the world” whom the “darkness never overwhelmed” – read the Bible book of John, chapter 1. That means that Jesus as the power of light and love would find opposition in anyone who used their power to diminish or to destroy other humans or the earth, the creation God called “good” (Genesis 1 - 2). In the days of Jesus, the Roman emperor, Caesar, was considered by Roman citizens to be “the light of the world” and the “son of god.” In Jesus, however, a new reign is inaugurated, the “Way” of living in the world that challenges any power that threatens to eclipse God’s original “good” world, often called the “kingdom of God.” The contest is epic, and it continues in you and me. So, let us gather to learn, to worship, to celebrate, to be challenged by, and to challenge with Jesus’ vision and “light” all that threatens to eclipse the good.

**The light of God’s love shines in the darkness and is not overcome!**

***Pastor Brandon***

**A Christmas Gift for Our Staff – Our *Staff-Parish Relations Committee* encourages you to generously participate in our tradition of a Christmas gift for our church staff. Please make your financial gift by 12 PM, Sunday, December 15th. Checks are made to “*Davis UMC*“ and note “*staff gift.” Then place it in an envelope and mail it to the church (1620 Anderson Rd, Davis CA 95616) or place it in Sunday’s offering plate. SPRC will distribute the gifts accordingly.  Thank you!***

**Be Involved with Service and Justice Ministry**

**December 2019**

*“I was a stranger and you invited me in....” (Matthew 25:35)*

As the nights grow colder and we reflect on the story of Christmas, we focus our attention on those in our own community who seek shelter.  In December, our gifts will benefit two organizations which provide shelter:  Empower Yolo, a refuge for women and children escaping violent environments, and Paul’s Place, a project of Davis Community Meals and Housing which will rebuild and greatly expand the resource center at 1111 H Street to provide small apartments, emergency beds, and additional services to those in poverty.

\*Come to the **Contemporary Issues forum** at 9:45 in the Walker Room on December 8. Our speaker will talk about Paul’s Place and share the plans for the site.

\*Take an ornament for a gift “wish” on the **Empower Yolo Giving Tree** (in the church narthex after Thanksgiving). Ornaments on the tree suggest a gift for a woman or child who is spending the holidays in their shelter.

\*Give generously. Our Special Offering on December 15 will be divided between **Empower Yolo and Paul’s Place**.  Our Christmas Eve offering will benefit **Davis Community Meals and Housing**.  Donations of food to our Feed My Sheep collection benefit **Grace in Action and the STEAC food closet**.

\*Advocate for change by **writing postcards** after services on December 15.

\*Help in **Grace Garden**, which provides fruits and vegetables to those in need. (Hours are 9-11, Monday, Thursday, and Saturday.) The Grace Garden cookbook makes a great gift!

\*In mid-January, look for sign-up sheets for the **Interfaith Rotating Winter Shelter (IRWS)**. Our church is scheduled to provide shelter for up to 25 people for the week beginning February 16.  This is an all-church effort!

***Have a blessed Christmas season.***

*Please add these services to your calendar and invite your family and friends to hear with you*

*the story that has formed our faith community for centuries and makes us aware of God's presence, now!*

**NOVEMBER**

**24 SUN 9:45 AM Alternative Giving Fair – *DUMC Fellowship Hall***

**4:00 PM Interfaith Thanksgiving Service – *Yolo County Food Bank***

**DECEMBER**

**1 SUN 8:30 & 11:00 AM ECLIPSING EMPIRE WITH “HOPE”  *Communion Celebration***

*Bring one ornament you are not fearful of losing or breaking to add to the Chrismons*

*that hang on our sanctuary Christmas tree during the Advent/Christmas season.*

**8 SUN 8:30 AM ECLIPSING EMPIRE WITH “PEACE”**

***Taize’ Worship and the contemplative practice of “Lectio Divina”***

**11:00 AM CHILDREN’S NATIVITY PLAY**

*Megan Houpt, director of children’s choir*

**12:30 PM A CHRISTMAS FEAST**

**15 SUN 8:30 & 11:00 AM ECLIPSING EMPIRE WITH “JOY”**

**22 SUN 8:30 & 11:00 AM ECLIPSING EMPIRE WITH “LOVE”**

**Christmas Cantata: “A Child This Day” *Feat. Kelly Wilkerson***

*Andrew Hudson, music director*

*Julia Butler, music coordinator and accompanist*

**24 TUE CHRISTMAS EVE SERVICES**

**7:00 PM ECLIPSING EMPIRE WITH “LOVE” *Feat. The Christmas Band***

*Stan “the music man” Johnson directs our merry “Christmas Band”.*

**9:00 PM A Classic Carols & Candles Christmas Service**

*Gather to hear of Jesus’ birth, sing carols of celebration, light candles of hope that*

*chase away the fear and meaninglessness that threaten to take the joy he brings!*

**25 WED Office CLOSED** **CHRISTMAS DAY!**

**29 SUN 8:30 & 11:00 AM ECLIPSING EMPIRE WITH “ATTENTIVENESS”**

***Taize’ Worship and the contemplative practice of “Lectio Divina”***

**JANUARY 2020**

**5 SUN 8:30 & 11:00 AM ECLIPSING EMPIRE WITH “PRESENCE” *Epiphany with Communion***